

DETAILED ACTION

The following is an examiner's statement of reasons for allowance:

Claim 1 is allowable over the cited prior art, Fukuda et al., (US 5,976,282) because Fukuda does not teach or suggest a process for continuous manufacture of an austenitic stainless steel strip having a dull surface appearance with a brightness of less than 30 and an arithmetic mean roughness Ra of greater than 0.12 microns, of the annealed/pickled type, the process comprising subjecting a cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip to a heat treatment in a bright annealing furnace inside which a flushing gas having *a dew point of above -5°C* circulates, said flushing gas comprising less than 1% oxygen by volume and less than 1% air by volume.

Fukuda teaches a process for the continuous manufacture of an austenitic stainless steel strip (title and abstract) comprising:

subjecting a cold-rolled (col. 4, line 21) austenitic stainless steel strip to a heat treatment in a bright annealing furnace (col. 1, line 30) inside which a flushing gas (N₂ as in example 1, col. 10, line 48) chosen from inert or reducing gases.

Fukuda teaches pickling the strip (or plates) having undergone the heat treatment (example 1), using an acid pickling solution (example 1) suitable for completely removing said oxide layer according to its thickness and its nature.

Fukuda does not teach an inert atmosphere with a gas having a dew point of between of above -5°C circulates, and the atmosphere comprising less than 1% oxygen by volume and less than 1% air by volume.

Fukuda does not teach producing a dull surface appearance or specific brightness and roughness values claimed.

Another reference that was not used in the rejection but is reasonably pertinent to the claimed endeavor is Fukuda JP 08-269754, which teaches a dew point of -10°C or less. However, '754 does not teach an inert atmosphere with a gas having a dew point of above -5°C circulates, and the atmosphere comprising less than 1% oxygen by volume and less than 1% air by volume. Fukuda '754 teaches away from anything above -5°C as required by claim 1 by stating that, if the dew point of a reducing atmosphere becomes higher than -10°C, the oxide layer would become too thick affecting the descaling nature and corrosion resistance of the steel (Fukuda par. 27).

Conclusion

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to ALEXANDER POLYANSKY whose telephone number is (571)270-5904. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. EST - 5:00 p.m. EST.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Jessica Ward can be reached on 571-272-1223. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300. Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from

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a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call
800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

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/Jessica L. Ward/
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